



Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

I write two days before Pentecost, so when you read this, the Easter season will be over and we will be back in “Ordinary Time” again. But Ordinary Time is really the extension of Pentecost throughout the year as the mighty wind and the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit continue to inspire Christians to spread the gospel and build up the Church in every age.

My personal appreciation of Pentecost has deepened considerably this past year because it is now a big part of my life as bishop to seal our young people with the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Again and again I see it happen: the spirit fashions unity out of multiplicity. Throughout the diocese hundreds step forward to be sealed; they step back into the oneness of their own lives to become themselves before God. But their spiritual oneness—their personal integrity—is now life-givingly linked to the “many parts” of the body of Christ by the grace of the Creator Spirit.

Centuries ago, St. Cyril of Jerusalem left us a beautiful explanation of how the Holy Spirit brings about such saving diversity in the Church. Pondering Christ’s promise that the water He would give would become “a fountain of living water, welling up into eternal life,” St. Cyril wondered why Jesus used water to describe the grace of the Holy

Spirit. “Because all things are dependent on water,” he answered. “Water comes down from heaven as rain, and although it is always the same itself, it produces many different effects, one in the palm tree, another in the vine, and so on throughout the whole of creation. It does not come down, now as one thing, now as another, but while remaining essentially the same, it adapts itself to the needs of every creature that receives it.”

So it is, St. Cyril says, with the working of the Holy Spirit. Like the rain, “the Spirit never changes,” but His grace brings about vastly different effects in those on whom it falls. “His action is different in different people, but the Spirit Himself is always the same.”

Christ offered this great Gift of God in its fullness to anyone who would come to Him and drink. “It is everywhere available,” St. Hilary notes, “but it is given to each man in proportion to his readiness to receive it. Its presence is the fuller, the greater a man’s desire to be worthy of it.”

Whether we were confirmed yesterday or years ago, we should always desire to be more worthy of the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God—and not just for our own sake. For, as St. Cyril reminds us, the Holy Spirit “comes to enlighten the mind first of the one who receives Him, and then, through him or her, the minds of others as well.” May those who are sealed with the Spirit this year have their faith in Christ confirmed and live it in a way that confirms the faith of others.